

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

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FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4132

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON

COMNAVTELCOM WASHDC

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN

COMIDEASTFOR

NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA

NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI

CNO WASHDC

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, PINT ET

SUBJECT: AN UNEVENTFUL REVOLUTION DAY IN ASMARA

1. AS THE SEPT. 12 REVOLUTION DAY APPROACHED, THERE WAS AN OBVIOUS INCREASE IN SECURITY MEASURES IMPLEMENTED BY THE EPMG AUTHORITIES. PATROLS WITHIN THE CITY WERE INCREASED AND ARMORED VEHICLES WERE DISPATCHED TO REINFORCE OUTPOSTS AROUND ASMARA. IN CONTRAST TO LAST YEAR'S CELEBRATION, THERE WERE VIRTUALLY NO ADVANCE RUMORS OF ANY PROPOSED INSURGENT ACTION. THE ETHIOPIAN NEW YEAR (SEPT 11), LARGELY A FAMILY AND RELIGIOUS HOLIDAY, PASSED QUIETLY. IF THERE WERE TO BE ANY TROUBLE IT WAS ANTICIPATED FOR THE NIGHT OF SEPT 11-12, YET THE NIGHT PASSED WITH ONLY LIGHT SCATTERED FIRING AT VARIOUS POINTS IN AND ABOUT THE CITY.

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2. ON THE MORNING OF SEPT 12, ABOUT 15,000 MEMBERS OF CIVIC GROUPS, LABOR UNIONS, AND KEBELES (URBAN DISTRICT COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS) ASSEMBLED AT QUEEN OF SHEBA STADIUM SHORTLY AFTER CURFEW LIFTED AT 6 AM. ATTENDANCE WAS MANDATORY, AND ROLL WAS REPORTEDLY TAKEN. SECURITY FOR THE CEREMONY WAS MASSIVE, WITH TROOPS LINING THE STREETS AND BUILDINGS FOR A MILE AROUND THE STADIUM. ELEMENTS OF THE FLAME DIVISION WERE APPARENTLY AIRLIFTED FROM KEREN TO ENHANCE SECURITY. THE CONSULAR CORPS ARRIVED AT 9:30 BY WHICH TIME MOST DIGNITARIES AND 5-10 THOUSAND SPECTATORS WERE IN PLACE. SHORTLY AFTER 10 AM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR, COL. FIKRU, AND THE CO OF THE SECOND DIVISION ARRIVED IN A FLURRY OF MERCEDES AND MACHINEGUN JEEPS. THERE WERE FOUR SPEECHES IN AMHARIC BY REPRESENTATIVES OF LABOR, WOMEN'S GROUPS, FARMERS AND THE POPULACE OF ASMARA ASKING THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR TO RELAY THEIR THANKS FOR THE BLESSINGS THEY HAVE RECEIVED FROM THE ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION. THE SPEECHMAKING CONCLUDED WITH AN ADDRESS BY FIKRU, WHICH WAS FOLLOWED BY A PARADE THAT LASTED JUST OVER AN HOUR. THE PARADE WAS NOTABLE ONLY BY THE ABSENCE OF SLOGANS, POLITICAL COMMENTARY OR CARICATURES.

3. COL. FIKRU'S SPEECH REFLECTED THE CURRENT EPMG LINE ON PEACE EFFORTS IN ERITREA. HE NOTED THAT THE "SEPARATISTS" ARE DIVIDED AND FIGHTING AMONG THEMSELVES, AND THAT NOW A THIRD GROUP HAD EMERGED LED BY OSMAN SALEH SABBE. HE REITERATED CHARGES OF FOREIGN SUPPORT FOR THE REBELS, BRANDING THESE GOVERNMENTS "ENEMIES OF ETHIOPIA." NOTING THAT THE EPMG HAS BEEN "STRUGGLING FOR PEACE" SINCE THE NINE-POINT DECLARATION OF MAY, 1976, HE EXPRESSED THE WISH THAT NEXT REVOLUTION DAY WILL BE CELEBRATED IN PEACE.

4. IT IS ESTIMATED THAT BETWEEN 20 AND 25 THOUSAND PEOPLE PARTICIPATED IN THE TWO-HOUR CEREMONIES AT THE STADIUM. THIS TURNOUT WAS A SIGNAL SUCCESS FOR KEBEDE ANNISA, ACTING DIRECTOR OF INFORMATION

IN ASMARA, WHO ORGANIZED THE AFFAIR. THE KEBELE MEMBERS DISPLAYED GREATER ENTHUSIASM THAN MOST MARCHERS, ALTHOUGH THEY SEEMED MOST ENTHRALLED BY THE OPPORTUNITY TO DANCE AND ENJOY THEMSELVES THAN BY THE BOUNTY OF THE REVOLUTION. TV VIDEOTAPE MACHINES RECORDED THESE MINI-DEMONSTRATIONS, AS WELL AS THE WILD SCRAMBLE FOR LEAFLETS DROPPED REPEATEDLY BY HELICOPTER, AS AN UNBRIDLED DISPLAY OF ERITREAN ENTHUSIASM FOR THE REVOLUTION. DESPITE THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IMPLICIT DURESS AND THE OBVIOUS CHICANERY, THE CEREMONY WAS BOTH WELL EXECUTED AND IMPRESSIVE. FOLLOWING THE CEREMONIES, LIFE IN ASMARA RETURNED TO A NORMALLY SUBDUED HOLIDAY WEEKEND. AS THERE WERE NO INSURGENT-INSPIRED INCIDENTS THROUGHOUT THE WEEKEND, ASMARA BREATHED A SIGH OF RELIEF ON MONDAY MORNING.

5. COMMENT: FIKRU'S SPEECH, WHILE CONSILIENT WITH OFFICIAL EPMG POLICY ON ERITREA, WAS APPARENTLY DEVOID OF ANY PROVOCATION OR

THREAT, MUCH TO THE RELIEF OF ERITREANS AND ETHIOPIANS ALIKE.
THIS MAY INDICATE GRADUAL SHIFT AWAY FROM DOGMA AND TOWARD A
PRAGMATISM WHICH STEMS FROM EXPERIENCE ON THE GROUND.

DECON SEPT. 30, 1978.
SLUTZ

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